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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S INTRODUCTORY MEETING WITH TURKISH FM  
GUL - REALISTIC, STRATEGIC VIEW

REF: A. ANKARA 7377

[1](#)B. ISTANBUL 2059

Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

1.(C) Summary: In a 75-minute introductory call on Turkish FM Abdullah Gul December 15, Ambassador laid out his priorities of continuing to improve the tone and content of the bilateral relationship, working closely with Turkey on important regional issues, and supporting continued Turkish reform efforts. Ambassador and Gul focused on the importance of success in Iraq and follow-up to the elections there, and Gul explained the behavior changes Ankara seeks to extract from Damascus and Tehran. He made a pitch for greater U.S. investment and undertook to improve the situation for the U.S. defense industry. On Turkey's EU accession process, Gul expressed concern that Cyprus-related issues could throw up roadblocks and asked for USG help, both in moving forward on Cyprus in the UN context and, as possible, with the EU. The EU process, Gul emphasized, helps Turkey by anchoring its economic and democratic reform process, and it demonstrates appreciation for Turkish democracy that will inspire others in the Muslim world. End summary.

2.(C) Ambassador stressed the high interest vis-a-vis Turkey in Washington and acknowledged improvements in U.S.-Turkish bilateral relations. PM Erdogan's June trip to Washington was important, as were visits here by Secretary Rice in February and NSA Hadley in September. Both governments desired a better tone in the relationship. Secretary Rice, during Ambassador's swearing in, had spoken of U.S.-Turkish relations as a "strategic partnership of extreme importance" and made clear to the Ambassador privately her desire to come to Turkey early in the new year when we hope to start an institutionalized strategic bilateral dialogue.

3.(C) Ambassador explained his priorities as three-fold: continuing to improve the tone of our dialogue and use it to produce concrete results; working with Turkey on our regional agenda; and supporting continued GoT economic and democratic reform as Turkey moves forward with EU accession, including especially with regard to strengthening democratic institutions and respect for fundamental human rights.

[1](#)4. (C) Ambassador said that our number one priority is success in Iraq. Turkey has been helpful. We valued highly the FM's initiative to bring Iraqi Sunni representatives to Istanbul to meet with Ambassador Khalilzad. One week later, a prominent Iraqi Sunni group had called for a break in the violence. It would be particularly useful, Ambassador underscored, for Turkey to encourage progress in the wake of the elections, join in recognizing positive progress, and urge negotiations for an inclusive government, and especially to appeal for a continued halt in insurgent terrorism.

[1](#)5. (C) We also recognized the importance of dealing with the PKK, Ambassador continued. Our success in Iraq would be reflected in part by Iraq's ability to control its borders and territory. In the interim, we are working on a number of other fronts, including bringing an interagency team to Ankara to work with Turkish ministries to produce effective, actionable - not political - dossiers on organizations and people in Europe, on the basis of which European law enforcement could act. Gul agreed with such an approach. He had asked the Justice and Interior Ministers what sorts of files they were sending, and had told them the documentation must be "concrete".

[1](#)6. (S) Ambassador noted USG interest in the discussions between TNIO Under Secretary Taner and Iraqi Kurdish leader Barzani on the PKK, but added we were unsure of Turkey's overall goals and intentions. We want to understand the GoT's priorities so we can be helpful.

[1](#)7. (C) Further on the regional agenda, Ambassador noted that Turkey is well aware of our concerns on Syria and Iran. We are looking for results; changes in behavior. The Iranian President's statements were deeply disturbing. Both Syria and Iran are allowing bad people to flow into Iraq. Cyprus was also important. We believe Turkey wants what we want: a settlement acceptable to both sides of the island achieved through the UN negotiating process. Ambassador pledged to continue to work with the UN and within our own channels to determine on what basis the GOC is prepared to negotiate and

to help Turkey and the EU manage the issue so it does not derail Turkey's accession process. Ambassador also flagged the Caucasus and Central Asia as an area in which he has personal background and where he sees scope for expanded U.S.- Turkish collaboration and consultation that could benefit all in the region.

18. (C) FM Gul welcomed Ambassador, stressing the long tradition of U.S.-Turkish relations and their importance both for Turkey and for the region. Gul urged an open, frank relationship where we can work together closely, discuss issues both when we agree and when we disagree, thus strengthening and deepening the relationship. High level visits were useful and should continue. We share a vision, he said, which is not just military or economic, but is valued-based: our societies must allow democracy and respect for human rights to flourish.

19. (C) Iraq, Gul said, was a neighbor; many Turks had close family ties. If there is a fire there, he stated, we feel the heat. He praised the current level of consultations and noted the importance of the push for a stable, democratic Iraq. Iraqis, he said, are an educated people, and the country is rich in natural and human resources. With stability, just imagine the contribution Iraq could make to the region, he said.

110. (C) Turkey continues to contribute to building that reality, Gul continued. Some 3,000 trucks a day carry logistical support; Turkey has paid a high price in drivers' lives. Turkish construction firms are active in cities such as Fellujah and Ramadah, as well as across northern Iraq. The GoT wants to contribute more to training police and security forces. Political parties of all stripes come to Turkey to learn. The December 15 election would, he hoped, unroll fairly and with no major problems. He had received word from Kirkuk that "thousands" were brought there to vote. Turkey wanted reality to be respected, Gul stated -- one group could not be allowed to oppress others. This was not an issue of Turks versus Kurds; what was needed was a government of national reconciliation that could pull the entire country together and solidify an Iraqi identity. He agreed with Ambassador that further work on the constitution was needed as well. The decision of Sunnis to participate in the voting would, Gul thought, contribute post-election to the further isolation of the terrorist forces within Iraq, especially Al Qaeda. Most Sunnis do not want to be associated with the terrorists.

111. (S) Gul noted continuing problems with the PKK and the difficulties of explaining to a domestic audience why a force of several thousand cannot be contained. Referring to recent travels by Iraqi Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani, Gul mentioned the "dangers" of regional leaders consulting on the broader international stage. If they do so, others may follow suit. What is needed, in Gul's view, is for them to look to Baghdad. That will relax their neighbors, which will, in turn, allow them to get more from Ankara. The GoT had sent TNIO Under Secretary Taner to northern Iraq after discussions in Ankara with Nechirvan Barzani and Barham Salih. He hoped that Turkey, the U.S. and Iraq could work collectively together on a strategy that would help defeat PKK terror in northern Iraq. Cooperation on law enforcement and shutting down finances are important as well. With respect to combating money laundering, the Finance Ministry was about to send a draft bill to parliament; that, too, would help.

112. (C) On Iran, Gul termed President Ahmedi-nejad's recent series of statements "irrational." He hoped the regime in Tehran would back down. Gul said he had "told them straight" what the issues and problems are, both in Ankara during Iranian FM Mottaki's visit, and subsequently in Mecca, at the OIC meeting, where the Iranians had been isolated on a number of issues. The situation, Ambassador said, appears dangerous -- all signs emanating from Tehran are bad. Gul responded that Turkey wants no WMD or radical regimes in the neighborhood; he had made that clear. Iran is a neighbor; Turkey has security issues, and there is PKK in Iran as well. However, Turkey influences Iran, not the reverse: Iranians watch Turkish TV, and travel here for tourism - some 800,000 come annually, mostly to the seaside in Antalya.

113. (C) Acknowledging that Turkey has to deal with Iran as a neighbor, Ambassador cautioned Gul to be judicious in what Turkey does and how it portrays those actions. Turkey's recent overtures to Tehran and Damascus had soured normally pro-Turkish sentiment in various quarters in Washington, and Turkey won't help itself to exacerbate that. Gul agreed. He said Turkey's mission in both Iran and Syria is to help force change. Turkey has an 800-kilometer long border with Syria, too, as well as security issues. The GoT truly wants to see democratic regimes. The ultimate goal is to change the way the regimes behave. He pledged to cooperate closely and to share information regularly on these matters.

14. (C) On the domestic front, Gul said that Turkey has changed a great deal; taboos are being lifted and democracy upgraded. The GoT was consciously pressing forward with these changes. The point of anchoring Turkey with the EU and working toward a democracy and an economy compatible with European standards was to create a bulwark in the region. He likened it to building a dam - it changes the environment. Sooner or later, in the Middle East and the Islamic world, others would be influenced.

15. (C) On the economy, Gul stated, Turkey must do more to increase trade with the U.S. Many legal barriers had been removed, in his view. Ambassador responded that it was his goal, as well, to improve bilateral trade and increase investment. Many of the legislative changes Turkey had instituted in the context of EU accession were helpful. However, one theme from Washington he heard before coming to Turkey is that U.S. defense industries, which traditionally have enjoyed a strong presence in Turkey, feel they are being squeezed out. If they conclude they cannot compete and leave Turkey, then already inadequate trade and investment will decline further and word will spread that Turkey is a bad place for business. Gul indicated he was aware of the problem and intended to fix it in order to allow U.S. defense industry firms to compete effectively. Turkish forces had long used American equipment, he said; that should continue.

16. (C) With respect to the EU, Gul thanked Ambassador for U.S. help at all levels in the run-up to the October 3 start of Turkey's formal accession negotiations. He hoped the accession process would move forward. The GoT, he stated, is well aware of its responsibilities and is prepared to fulfill them. The one stumbling block, however, is Cyprus. In his view, the GoC has "exploited" EU member countries. EU solidarity was a good thing, but when one member endangered others' interests, they should react. The EU had not kept its word and was forgetting what had happened in the April 2004 referendum. We and the Europeans had asked Ankara to show leadership; it had done so, despite the political risks. Now, it was as if nothing had happened, and the EU is asking Turkey to do "unbelievable" things. Gul had asked UNSYG Annan a number of times to re-start the process. As he had told Secretary Rice, though, in his view, the GoC understands only one language: the threat of an increase in relations with the Turkish Cypriots. Turkey's process with the EU is essential for Turkey's continued transformation; it should not be blocked. Gul had phoned an EU contact to urge that they be part of the solution, not part of the problem.

17. (C) Ambassador responded that, as EUR A/S Fried had told outgoing Turkish Ambassador to the U.S. Logoglu earlier in the week, we would continue to try to be helpful on Cyprus and ensure it doesn't become an undue obstacle in the EU accession negotiations. He related his experience with other countries that had had difficult accession process issues: while doing what they could on those problems, they had tried to race ahead on other matters so as to build confidence with Brussels and member States and then more skillfully manage internal EU politics. In the end, Gul said, Turkey could enrich the EU; he was aware of Turkey's shortcomings, but proud that it was proving to other Muslim countries that it is possible to have a democracy that aspires to European standards; many are watching.

18. (C) Comment: Gul was focused and expansive. The depth and breadth of the meeting, and the FM's expressed commitment to continued engagement, are good signs.

WILSON